



SPOKANE CITY COUNCIL
808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.
Spokane, WA 99201-3335
(509) 625-6255

June 30, 2008

Brian Sonntag
State Auditor
Washington State Auditor's Office
Sunset Building, 3200 Capital Building
P. O. Box 40031
Olympia, WA 98504-0031

RE: Public Records Audit Report

Dear Mr. Sonntag:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Citizen's Initiative 900. The State Auditor's Office objective analysis will assist the City as part of the ongoing internal analysis and improvements currently being made in the public disclosure processes. The City of Spokane supports open public government and our state's Public Records Act and recognizes that the Public Disclosure Act is one of the primary ways the public keeps informed about government.

The State Auditor's work identified 21 best practices in 19 content areas for how the City processes public records requests. This information, as well as the comparative best practices of other agencies, is welcomed as a tool for improvement. The following information is provided on issues identified in the Open Public Records Audit's findings which are specific to the City of Spokane.

Finding 1

One of 10 unannounced public records requests (10 percent) conducted in the City of Spokane was considered non responsive (response or records not received by requestor). Additionally, one response (10 percent) was considered nonconforming.

Recommendations

- Evaluate processes and controls over incoming mail to ensure records requests are found and properly routed.
- Review responses and communicate with requestors to ensure the records to be provided are consistent with the request.

City Corrective Actions and Implementation Status

On May 5, 2008, the newly created Deputy Clerk position was filled. This new position will provide additional resources where there have been constraints related to staffing in the past and principally assigned to the public records function. Additional actions to be taken by staff will include:

- The development of a data base for tracking public records requests.
- Public records requests procedures will be standardized and coordinated in and between departments.

Finding 2

Some entities do not accommodate a variety of public records requests and therefore do not provide the public with the fullest assistance.

Recommendations

- Establish policies that are consistent with the Public Records Act, using the attorney General's model rules as a guide.
- Conduct broad staff training on the Public Records Act.
- Accommodate as many modes of requesting public records as practically possible.
- Consider receiving records requests online.

City Corrective Actions and Implementation Status

Administrative policy and procedures for public records requests are currently under review by the agency and will be updated mindful of the recent developments in public records management, the Public Records Act and the Washington Attorney General's model rules for paper and electronic records. Additional actions to be taken by staff will include:

- Training will be provided to departments on the Public Records Act.
- Feasibility of using email for Public Records requests will be evaluated.

Finding 4

Some entities provided the requested public records in a less than timely manner than their peers.

Recommendations

- Prioritize incoming records requests to identify those that require review and/or redaction verses more straight forward requests that can be filled more quickly.
- Use e-mail to respond to public records requests whenever possible.
- Explore opportunities for providing records electronically.
- Engage in ongoing communication with the requestor about priorities and timelines when a request is identified that may take some time to fill.

City Corrective Actions and Implementation Status

In the first quarter of 2008 an Enterprise Vault was set up as an email archiving solution that allows for more productive email storage and recovery of the email system. This archiving enables the capability to search and locate email content and documents to meet both legal and regulatory compliance requirements.

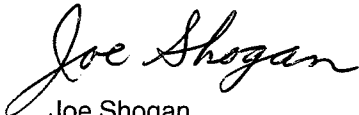
The City's department of Management Information Services has invested resources of nearly 1 million dollars, excluding staff time, on a document imaging system for the Police Department and City Clerk's Office. This system was implemented in mid 2003 and has been continuously maintained and improved with an ongoing investment. The system is mainly used for the storage of City Clerk documents and is available to the public in a searchable format on the City's website.

As more public records have become available electronically the City has recognized the opportunity to work with people who request electronic copies of public records. Electronic copies of records are made available in electronic format when possible. Additional actions to be taken by staff will include:

- Will be increasing the number of documents available on the City website.
- The City Clerk's Office will coordinate with the Management Information Systems Department for Enterprise Vault storage and retrieval.
- Records currently stored off-site will be indexed for more efficient retrieval.

The citizens of Spokane are engaged in city affairs. The City believes that the Public Records Act is good and positive for all governments to follow. The City agrees that improving accountability and transparency while engaging citizens leads to better government and we look forward to completing the audit reporting process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Shogan".

Joe Shogan
Council President

cc: Al French, Council Member
Bob Apple, Council Member
Richard Rush, Council Member
Michael Allen, Council Member
Steve Corker, Council Member
Nancy McLaughlin, Council Member
Mary Verner, Mayor
Gwen Fuller-Vernier, City Auditor
Terri Pfister, City Clerk
Pat Dalton, Acting City Attorney